J.C Bernard a friend of FPC preached twice - when we were recently in states invited a regularly. On two - a retreat for officers + diocesan priests at Faculty N. of Cty - Mundelein - Presbyterian receipt of known Colo - 7-up. Both had full bar - our people were eyes - at Card B saw us. + said -

"in the spirit of ecumenism - shamrock we have - Irish sound

CHURCH WIDE STAFF MEETING 3-22-98

FAMILY REUNION

Psalm 133
Colossians 1:15-20

"and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things." **Colossians 1:20**

March 22, 1998
Louisville

John M. Buchanan

In Joseph Cardinal Bernardin's little book, The Gift of Peace, which he was ~~working~~ worked hard before he died, just a year and a half ago, to complete ~~just a year ago~~, there is a gripping and moving account of his meeting with Steven Cook, the young man who had accused Cardinal Bernardin of sexual abuse. It is an event best forgotten except for the extraordinary way it concluded. In 1993 the

accusation became public and Cardinal Bernardin had to live in the glare of public curiosity, constant media attention and the deep pain of experiencing his credibility and integrity questioned by many people who simply assume that an accusation is the equivalent of guilt. And then, over time, Mr. Cook acknowledged that the charges were false and the case was dropped. The Cardinal plunged back into his busy schedule but he kept thinking about Steven Cook, his accuser, now critically ill with AIDS, living alone.

So Cardinal Bernardin did the most remarkable thing. He located Mr. Cook and

invited him to meet at a seminary outside of Philadelphia. Cardinal Bernardin explained that his only reason for wanting to see Mr. Cook was to tell him that he, Cardinal Bernardin, harbored no ill feelings. He wanted to pray with Mr. Cook.

Steven Cook accepted the invitation and said that he wanted to apologize for the hurt and embarrassment he had caused. When the meeting happened, Mr. Cook told his story, including his alienation from the church. They talked for awhile. The Cardinal said what he had come to say and he gave Mr. Cook an inscribed Bible and offered to celebrate mass.

after all, he hadn't been to Mass for a long time: nearly years of alienation from the church

Mr. Cook hesitated [redacted]. Cardinal Bernardin took a hundred year-old chalice out of his case. "Steven, this is a gift from a man I don't even know. He sent it to me + He asked me to use it to say mass for you some day." "Please," Steven responded tearfully, "let's celebrate mass now."

Afterward, Steven Cook said, "A big burden has been lifted from me today. I feel healed and very much at peace." Cardinal Bernardin reflected, "As we flew back to Chicago that evening, Father Donohue and I felt the lightness of spirit that an afternoon of grace brings to one's life." [See The Gift of Peace, p. 34-41]

"the lightness of spirit that an afternoon of grace brings ..."

– what a blessing – what a thought – at this moment – for us Presbyterians

"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity," a poet wrote 3,000 years ago.

I love that ancient poem, Psalm 133. I found myself thinking about it a lot last year as I traveled throughout the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which does not often feel like it is dwelling in unity, or even wants to, for that matter. The psalm's purpose, someone suggested, is to celebrate a particularly happy

family reunion. Families seem to act pretty much the same over the centuries and millennia. Sometimes they get along, sometimes not. Three thousand years ago, in an agrarian, tribal culture, families argued and fought about land mostly and livestock and jealousy; and why does Dad always seem to favor you and when I was your age he would never have let me get away with that. Parents know how painful it is when adult children fight or are alienated. And parents also know how exquisitely happy it is when adult children care for and about one another, ("when kindred dwell in unity.")

How good -

In my life there is nothing as sweet as the fact that my sons & daughters stay in touch, call, visit, like to spend time w/ me & each warm about me each

It's a family reunion and everybody is there. There are aunts and uncles and cousins and fathers and mothers, and lots of children and some new babies who have made their appearance since the last reunion, so there's lots of "oohing" and "aahing" and passing the babies around. And the food – everybody brought something. In fact, each family tried to outdo the others, so there was an abundance of food, far more than could be eaten.

And in the middle, the grandparents, looking at all of this with profound wonder, maybe holding hands and thinking that it wasn't really so very long ago that none of this existed

That's begin th happ— t me a lot.

– none of these people – just the two of us. And so, I think it was the old man or the old woman who went home that night and wrote,

> "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity. It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes."

This joy is so profound it warrants extravagance, like opening a bottle of the finest wine, saved over the years for an occasion such as this. Oil is precious, necessary for

heat and light. Only rarely is it used to taste, or to make the face shine for your beloved. Never is it simply poured out in celebration, only when no other gesture will express the glory of this wondrous moment. – like champagne on the mast in the locker room

"How very good and pleasant it is

when kindred live together in unity."

*****

St. Paul, our earliest missionary and theologian, was an uncompromising follower of Jesus. Jesus Christ was, for him, the way, the truth and the life, the complete revelation of

God. But the older Paul became and the more he observed how religion, including his own, served to divide the human family instead of reconcile it, the more he talked and wrote as if he believed that the peace of the family, the coming together of human beings, was what God had in mind all along. It was, he wrote, God's purpose – to bring together, to reconcile all things.

> "In Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself." Colossians 1:19, 20

evangelical

In tension within the particularities of Paul's thought – that Jesus Christ is God's truth – in tension, then, is a universalism which suggests that God's purpose from the beginning of time has been the unity of the family.

Augustine intersects Calvin + Karl Barth.

The sad reality is that religion doesn't often contribute to that. The sad truth is that the history of human religion is the story of conflict, of ideological and too frequently, actual warfare in which human beings kill other human beings in the name of their God.

The sad reality of the Reformed tradition is that we have a habit of resolving our differences by splitting the church, by walking away – or insisting that those w/ whom we disagree leave.

I just received a letter from fellow Presbyterians – advising 45% of us – clergy + elders to passively submit to the will of 55% or leave.

something which some cannot do + keep faith w/ conscience + God's will as they perceive it

The hope is that if we can just all agree w our creeds. if we excise the ones who don't agree, if we can purify the church theologically - ideologically - it will please God + the church will grow. Don't count on it. Don't believe it. I think the work is simply find y our friends : bond w/ us.. + our willingness to use our reason + energy in this manner.

Mark Twain didn't want to have much to do with organized religion and this is why. One time he wrote:

> "I built a cage and in it put a dog and cat. And after a little training, I got the dog and cat to a point where they lived peacefully together. Then I introduced a pig, kangaroo, some birds and a monkey. And after a few adjustments, they learned to live in harmony. So encouraged was I by such successes that I added an Irish Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Moslem, a Buddhist, along with a

Baptist missionary ... and in a very short while there wasn't a single living thing left in the cage."

There is, of course, an alternate story. The conflict gets all the press but sometimes God's people do extraordinarily reconciling and unifying things.

Peter Kuzmic is the President of Evangelical Seminary in Ocijek, Croatia, where Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission workers Steve and Michele Kurtz are on the faculty. Peter, who is a Calvinist Pentecostal and one of the leading Missiologists in the world, teaches

that missionary effectiveness depends on authenticity and that there is no authenticity in mission that does not reflect not only Christian unity, but that deeper, magnificent new creation, new humanity St. Paul talked about.

One of Peter's colleagues is a delightful Croatian of Serbian descent, Antol Bolag. Antol was a businessman who decided to give his life to Jesus Christ and now is managing refugee resettlement, sponsored by the Agape Project, which is supported by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and One Great Hour of Sharing.

Antol is in charge of rebuilding villages that have been destroyed in the war and resettling refugees. He was working with the mayor – village chief, of a Muslim village that was totally destroyed. Antol was bringing together the materials and resources to rebuild the village, a house at a time. Looking at the plans with the Muslim chief, he noticed that the village Mosque was not on the drawing and he inquired about it. His Muslim colleague was surprised. "You're a Christian, aren't you? You want to convert us. Why are Christians willing to help us rebuild our Mosque?" And Antol Bolag said, "We will help you rebuild your Mosque because we are followers of Jesus,

and Jesus told us to love our neighbors, to stand with them. And Jesus told a story one time about a Good Samaritan who helped his neighbor without asking him about his theology."

("Behold how good and pleasant it is.")

I will never celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper again without thinking about brothers and sisters I have met I have met and with whom I worshipped last year in Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Italy, Hungry, Croatia and Korea. I'm remembering a feeding center in Ocijek where Presbyterian dollars feed

Bosnian Moslem refugees. I'm remembering festive meals which became sacramental occasions of deep and powerful meaning: in the fifth floor walk-up of Isaac and Magdalena Jorge, Moderator of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba, lovingly prepared, and then the lights went out and we continued by flashlight. I'm thinking today of the extraordinary family within the human family that is the Christian Church, the Holy Catholic Church, which transcends national boundary, ethnicity, even theology and ecclesiology. . . imagining God's great family reunion.

I'm thinking of Korea & that border that has divided a country & a people for 50 years.. 10 million S. Koreans have relatives in N they have't communicated with since 1950. I heard about one of them - an ancient named Kim - fled S. in 1950 - left wife & daughter - a Kim in his 70's - works in S. Seoul - Korean Presbyterian Church - has not found wife. 500 churches.

I keep being reminded - even in the midst of our arguments & conflicts, our name calling, our questioning of another's sincerity & integrity.

And I'm also remembering that God has an even more ambitious plan for creation: that God means for all things to be reconciled: that God's love and grace, as always, challenges and pushes and stretches my own Presbyterian provincial way of seeing things. I keep being reminded of Paul's brave suggestion that all fullness of God came among us in Jesus Christ and that the purpose of the project was not to make everybody a Presbyterian or Baptist or Roman Catholic, but to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

at work in the world

- to get everybody in the same ideological cup

I keep remembering theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg's wonderful reminder that this is

the Lord's Supper, not a church supper, and that we don't get to be in charge of the guest list at this reunion banquet – God does the inviting; that our ~~priority~~ responsibility is not to see who gets in or who is excluded, but our own table manners and to see that God's hospitality is extended to all.

I'm reminded that while there may be plenty of places in this world where you and I may not be welcome, we are invited to be here. I am reminded that while there may be plenty of times and places, perhaps even your most intimate relationships, where you are most vulnerable, where you do not feel accepted

perhaps your relationship with the people or

[illegible] body who pays your salary

without condition, or wanted without reservation, you are accepted and wanted here. I am reminded that while there are plenty of places where you need credentials before you get in, your membership card, your certificate of belonging, your engraved invitation, or your theological or moral credentials – the only requisite for admission to this table is that in some way you want to be here: that in some way you claim Jesus as the truth for you and in some way want to follow – want to be a part of whatever he is up to in the world.

Cardinal Bernardin remembered fondly how his mother taught him the importance of family, even family in Italy he had never seen. He wrote, "I believe, however, as my mother always has, that family goes well beyond blood ties. Family is the human community." [p 68-70]

Steven Cook died a few months after his reconciliation with Cardinal Bernardin.

Cardinal Bernardin died two years later, [redacted]er, and I love the thought that somehow in the mystery of God, they are at the table [redacted] – with us, with all of God's people in together.

all time and all places, God's great family reunion.

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is."

Amen.